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PEU Method in clinical psychology, personal development and education – theoretical and methodological characteristics, validation, applied domains

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Abstract

Unifying experiential psychotherapy (UEP) was elaborated, implemented, published and validated on a large Romanian population (almost 10,000 people), as a personalized method, across 15 years of work. The validation of the results was done gradually, extensively and dynamically, comprising over 60 published works (books, doctoral and master papers, articles and scientific releases). The meta-analysis presented in this study integrates the results of multiple pilot researches realized within the University of Bucharest, and other Romanian universities, the SPER Institute and some psychiatry, psycho-oncology, psycho-somatic and geriatric clinics and hospitals, as well as NGOs in the field, and the system of assistance and protection of child and family.

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1. The UEP characteristics and the theoretical and methodological framework

The characteristics of the UEP method (individual, couple and family) and its methodological extension – UPD (unifying personal development within an experiential group) resides in its holistic, synergetic, creative and integrating approach of the person and of the group (Mitrofan 2000, 2004). Our method acknowledges and takes responsibility for its belonging to the humanist-experiential, positive and restructuring orientation in the field of Psychology and Psychotherapy, through its theoretical premises, conceptual approach to personality and general goals. UEP assumes consonances, theoretical and partially methodological interferences with: analytical therapy and other psychodynamic therapies, Gestalt therapy

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(F. Pearls), Rogerian therapy and I.L. Moreno's psychodrama, creative group therapies, Victor Frankl's logotherapy, transgenerational analysis, other experiential therapies, Ericksonian hypnosis, some psychobodily and meditative approaches, trauma centered and contextual-modular therapy (Francis Macnab), RET (A.Ellis), family therapies (narrative, experiential, and systemic). It is not a therapy of eclectic syntheses, as it has its own specifics and style of process development, of assistance and facilitation of the patient/client, of using the therapist's presence and the dynamic and creative therapeutic relationship, as well as the here and now therapeutic guidance.

2. Objectives and therapeutic relationship

2.1. Objectives of Unifying Experiential Psychotherapy (UEP) and Unifying Personal Development (UPD)

The objectives and intentions that the UEP and UPD assume are: unblocking the personal and collective development; activating creative resources and intentions, psycho-spiritual maturation and increasing adaptive efficiency to the rhythm and specifics of changes occurring in the present existential reality. How can these objectives be attained? By finding once again the evolving meaning, by adequately assuming and integrating identity roles (masculine-feminine, parent-son, professional and social roles), by accessing and converting to higher quality the relations between the polarities within the psyche, (unifying psychological effect), by engaging in a creative and realistic change of the life script, (individual, familial and professional script), by using inter-human differences while aware of their complementarities, with tolerance and harmonization, by using the exercise of freedom and democratic participation in community development.

2.2. Therapeutic relationship

It is a relationship of acquiring knowledge, of maturation and growing together. The level of work is from adult to adult, on the time axis, with respect to the rhythm, freedom and creativity of the patient in his own process of unblocking, balancing and self-restructuring. Therapeutic dependence, as well as self-sabotaging neurotic defenses are limited by the dimension of the responsible involvement and openness towards experimenting all testable, realistic and satisfying possibilities that the client has, under the condition that the practicing therapists are well aware of the script interferences and integrate them, as they can generate transfers and counter-transfers. UEP technically has a challenging experiential character, which is drama-therapeutic and creative meditative, and implies extensive and progressive awareness, thus helping the client undergo a process of self-restructuring and self-energizing. The process of therapeutic change or optimization is regarded and used as a process of "growing together".

3. Unifying therapeutic process – methodological framework and stages

UEP distinguishes itself from other methods within the same orientation through the dynamics, structure and stages of the therapeutic process, which are repeated according to the spiral principle, as well as through the created or adapted techniques, that were personalized and creatively modified, function of the client's, the couple's or the family's needs, with whom one works. As I previously mentioned, UEP aims for the unification and maturation of the person (or persons), through a meditative and self-restructuring process of expanding self-awareness, leading to a higher level of integration and maturation of the self, through the consonance, integration and functional expansion of affective, cognitive and imaginative, spiritual and behavioral-relational mechanisms – an "internal unification

effect”. The unifying therapeutic process is a health-generating, integrated, and self-regenerative process, taking place simultaneously on a bodily, psychological and social level.

3.1. Guiding marks for the unrolling of the therapeutic process

The fundamental guiding marks in the unrolling of the unifying therapeutic process are as follows: a) unfolding the script of the past – reconstructing and re-experimenting it in action and emotion, in the *here and now*, through dramatization, changing the perspective of assessment and positively re-signifying individual, family and transgenerational traumas; recovering the psycho-spiritual continuity of the transgenerational branches – integrating one’s roots; b) de-blocking, and spontaneously activating and reorienting creative resources towards self-development and inter-development; c) focusing on the present and on reality; d) rewriting in a creative and responsible manner the script of one’s life through experimentation, implementation and confirmation of changes and new life choices and projects – working with alternatives; e) stimulating self-knowledge, adaptive creativity and self-control, practice of freedom and maturity when taking decisions, in actions and relationships.

3.2. The characteristics of work techniques

The therapeutic mediation techniques are symbolic procedures that facilitate the self-transfiguring, restoring and unifying effect. I have conceived thus a diverse number of challenging (individual and collective) exercises, based on bodily and verbal metaphor, symbolic play of opposing roles, drama-therapeutic improvisation, and creative meditation with an art-therapy support. I have elaborated and applied my own techniques of achieving transgenerational unifying labors, which I called *drama-genogram*, *art-genogram*, *somatic-genogram*, which are useful in the process of separation, forgiveness, renegotiation and integration of traumatic experiences. I have created and implemented expressive-narrative improvisation with *natural elements* (*leaves, stones, seeds, branches etc*), as means to externalize conflicts that are not integrated. I have adapted through connection or I have transformed the manner of association between several techniques with an expressive-creative, projective support – visual-artistic, auditory, bodily. A special place is held by fractals, which represent a way to create meditative states (an original technique for regression and reconstruction of primary experiences), cinematherapy (creating films and enacting the films watched), phototherapy, working with masks etc. The aim of this flexible and creative connection of symbolic (verbal and nonverbal) techniques, is the harmonization, internal unification and efficiency of behaviors and relationships, on an individual, family, group and collective level at the same time. The effect of the UEP, (as well as that of UPD), is recurrent and unifying for all human levels of manifestations, expanding into a network at the level of family and organizations, and remains for a long term, within the community, as it is shown by doctoral researches of validation (Mitrofan, 2010, 2011, Godeanu, 2011, Mecu, 2010) and by research (Mitrofan, 2007).

4. Stages of the unifying therapeutic process

4.1. Symbolic experiential challenge (in UPD) or the symbolic accessing and reconfiguration of the blockage, existential trouble or present symptoms (in UEP, personalized from case to case).

Metaphors and drama-therapeutic symbolic pays or any other type of creative challenges (artistic, bodily, creative improvisation with natural elements, films, fractals etc) cause projections and accessing projections through the personalized manner of processing affective and cognitive experiential information. It is the first stage of symbolic externalization and reliving of the past in the present, of the

“film of one’s experiences”, both lived and imagined. This film of the “inner reality” that was created by the client or the patient becomes the present object of his creative meditation, which is provoked, supported and discretely guided by the therapist (in UEP) or by the trainer (in UPD). In the case of individual therapy, the work principle is maintained in the first stage, but the manner of approach is easier due to the symptoms or the distress that patient acknowledges (access metaphor). It is a first contact with the illusion of the script in which he lives and it allows him to become aware and identify blockages. For the therapist, it is a good chance to apply experiential diagnosis, to formulate his first suppositions and directions of investigation, according to the needs of the client and adapted to his specific mechanisms of symbolic and emotional processing. Here starts his therapeutic attendance in the process of awareness. It is obvious that from a technical point of view, UPD and UEP do not fully overlap, but use some technical creative modalities in a different manner and with personalized and contextualized goals.

4.2. Retracing and re-signifying identified traumas and blockages, which are specific to the case under focus.

At this stage, the process focuses on repairing labors, (separation, re-signifying, forgiveness and integration). Thus, conditions for “rewriting” the experiential past from the perspective of the present, are created. Re-experiencing in the present moment the traumatic relational and existential scenes, from the perspective of the witness, spontaneously creates the possibility to reprocess information from the modified point of view of the perception, reinterpretation and understanding of the adult at the present moment. The relation to the past is thus balanced and settled, from the point of view of its value, once again. The meaning of past experiences is changed and they have a benefic impact on the unlocking of present and future evolution processes. The effect is a reconnection on the time axis of the assisted person. Here, latent cognitive and affective resources become spontaneously activated and redirected in the process of unification, re-harmonization and maturation of the Self. An adequate, stimulating and creative therapeutic presence is essential at this stage, and the initial therapeutic instructions during the specific labors must be done correctly and with competence. In the technical arsenal that is used and re-adapted in the context of unifying purpose, we mention new variants of the empty chair technique and using meta-positions or re-negotiation dialogue with the transgenerational “ghosts” or with family or personal Shadow parts, through dramatization. Changing the perspective (re-signification) and starting the rewriting of the script of one’s life are essential for this work stage, as well.

4.3. Development of self-restructuring process through the activation of one’s own resources

This stage develops the self-restructuring process by means of activating one’s resources, one’s existential creativity to find solutions according to the needs that one assumes at the present moment, to the chosen goals and the potential that is at one’s disposal and that one gradually rediscovers. Working with alternatives, self-reprogramming and guided imagery, creative meditation and mental rewriting of one’s script while anchoring it on the time axis (bringing and experimenting the future in the present, that is, the projection of the possibilities, while enacting it and living its experience within the therapeutic space or in the experiential group) are part of the “challenges” that occur in a therapeutic relationship in the third stage of the unifying process. Yet it must be mentioned that these can only be discovered, lived and experienced on one’s own, in the therapeutic experience. UEP depends significantly on the state of living in the moment, in the therapeutic presence, and this, in turn, relies on the authenticity of the connection between the creative minds of the therapist and the clients.

4.4. Implementation of the new, better and certainly more promising script in one's daily life.

At this stage, the Patient becomes a Client, but most importantly, one becomes the autonomous person one wanted to be, but did not take responsibility for. He can now practice with detachment the freedom to be, to make mistakes, to learn, correct or change, to enrich parts of himself and his relations with the others and with the world. He now discovers on his own how he can live with others more creatively, responsibly, and with more humor. He accepts his life with more gratitude, and enjoys what he has and does even more, or at least he dares to start over again in a more relaxed and confident manner, to take risks in new changes and directions, to experiment. He gets new ideas and puts them into practice. Some are good ones, others are less inspired, but he remains motivated for life. He learns how to laugh in himself, and even with others, to accept from time to time the mind's games and whims, to understand differently (there are at least three possible variants each time). And all this transforms him in a person who is more aware of his power, who is more efficient and adjusted to the coming changes.

5. Applications and validation studies

The applications and validation studies can be grouped in three domains: 1. Clinical (individual, family and transgenerational pathologies); 2. Personal and social development (children, adolescents, adults, elderly people, couples, families, organizations); 3. Education (pre-university, university, post-university, forming of transversal competences, lifelong learning in adults – psychologists, teachers, doctors, social workers, theologians, school staff and other classes of professionals within domains that have a social and human impact. It must be noted that clinical studies confirmed the effects of the method and validated its adjustments to the treatment of depression, anxiety, psychosomatic disorders, emotional and adjustment disorders, sensitive relation delirium, re-socialization of schizophrenic people, emotional and behavioral disorders in children and adolescents, couple dysfunctions, identity and development issues, psycho-oncology, posttraumatic stress, assistance and development of abandoned, neglected or abused children and adolescents, in social protection of institutionalized children and adolescents, in the assistance of victims of human trafficking, in the complex assistance of addicts and their families.

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